

Texts: Gen. 18:1-15; 21:1-7; Mark 10:27

Subject: Isaac Born to Sarah

Theme: Nothing is Impossible

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost; Sept. 15, 2019, Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our father in heaven and the Lord Jesus,
Amen.

Wednesday morning, I left the coffee shop on Main street and headed around the block. My heart was heavy after reading remembrances of September 11, 2001. It's hard to believe that 18 years have passed since that day. Before, many of us never imagined such devastation was actually possible. I wondered if, in the aftermath, people could have known of the changes our world would see in the decades following the tragedy. There has been no drought of wars, tragedies, crisis, animosity, and fear. On Sept 12th, 2001 I found myself driving around the San Fernando Valley and saw many candlelight vigils, groups of people standing on the corner with flags, coming together, and holding each other in grief and in hope. Where did that hope go?

After the coffee shop, I ran into one of our neighbors experiencing homelessness. He used to come to the senior meal program here in the afternoon - he's 61 and homeless. We talked about an incident that happened here that has kept him away for a while - he had a conflict with another guest. I assured him he was welcome to come back, and asked if he needed anything. He said he was fine, but seemed unsure of what the future would bring. He was doing his best to survive, but was quite aware of the danger he faced being out on the streets. It seemed hard for him to hope.

Just down the road, I stopped off at the Las Vegas Healing Garden. It was quickly constructed after the October 1st shooting nearly two years ago. A man there was spraying a fresh coat of lacquer on the painted rocks that decorated a memorial to

someone - maybe a friend? a daughter? The morning was cool and I walked and prayed there in the garden, mindful that soon we'll see another tragic anniversary in this city. Where can we turn for hope?

I thought about Abraham and Sarah, who heard a promise that God would make of them a great nation - a multitude of descendants, more than the stars! God called him righteous, promised them land, and made a covenant with them. God promised them their descendants would outnumber the stars in the heavens. But time passed, and Sarah didn't have children. They waited for God's promise to come true. Maybe they lost hope, too. They decided to have an heir in another way, and Abraham had a son with Sarah's handmaid, Hagar - *who had no consent, no say in the matter*. Twenty-four years from the day he heard God's promise, the Lord appeared to Abraham again. Three strangers came to their door, and what started as a basic meal - bread and water to show hospitality - becomes a feast - fresh cakes, a calf, and all the fixings

These weren't just any hungry travelers, of course.

They were like old friends to Abraham - they'd talked before. They shared the meal, and they said to him "Where's your wife, Sarah?" They knew all about her too. She's in the tent. The question seem to be about more than just her location. Where is Sarah? Is she hiding? Is she ready to throw in the towel? Is she offended? afraid? hurting? holding out hope, or leaning on her own efforts to hold the family together?

Where is her focus?

Where is her faith?

The Lord came to bring a message - an annunciation. Soon, Sarah would have a son! Now, I know that women having children at an advanced age is not unheard of, but

we can imagine that Sarah is at least the average age of membership of a church in the ELCA (55), and Sarah believes herself to be unable to have children. She has waited for decades for her family to grow. She must believe that there is little hope for the promise to come true. When she hears the news that she will indeed have a son, she does what we might do - she laughs! Maybe it was a nervous laugh - as if she were to say, "How can this be?" It might be a cynical laugh - "There no way that's ever going to happen!" It might even be angry - "How dare you tease me like that!" In each instance her feelings would be valid. She just might be joyful, grateful, or astonished! This news is more than she can bear. *She laughs.* When the Lord says to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh?" she denies it. "I didn't laugh" The Lord says, "Oh yes you did."

God knows her. God knows our feelings.

God knows our reality, our pain and longing, our cynicism and desperation.

While we wait for God's promises to come true in our own life, we might despair - we turn into *Veruca Salt* - we want it now! it can be hard to believe in a God of love and peace when all we know is pain and grief. I can't imagine what it's like for people driven from their home because of violence in their communities, children who have seen the devastation of war, families going hungry because of famine, or entire cities destroyed by natural disasters, to hear their pleas fall on deaf ears, or to be turned away, to lack food and shelter, to live in fear of authorities, or to be detained without access to help. Should we tell them, "Go in peace - Christ is with you!" They might laugh. That's okay. For some, it's easy to persevere, and for others, hope is a distant memory.

How do we hold onto faith when everything around us is falling apart?

How do we live when our rescue seems so far off?

Sarah waited for the promise of God to come to her, and for nearly a quarter of a century - nothing. When it was announced that the time had finally arrived for something good to happen in her life - she found it hard to believe. The Lord knew. She *did* laugh. Still, God would fulfill the promise. The gift of a Son would not be withheld, whether Sarah was hopeful or despairing - God would take action.

Maybe we hope and pray for God to act in our lifetime. Often I pray, that way:

Come Lord Jesus, show us your face, wipe away our tears, enter our reality once again in a way that everyone would know your goodness - turn us from the pain we cause one another, make there be enough for all to not just survive, but thrive, and help us to see that everything we need has been given to us through your Son, Jesus.

The promise can't come fast enough for us.

Sarah's true feelings come out - maybe she's afraid to admit it - "yeah I laughed, Lord" - out of reverent fear, maybe her faith isn't all gone - the Lord is right there with them, after all. "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" Maybe faith was possible after all, and this promise could really come true - even after the struggles of the past. Maybe there was hope in trusting in God, who does more than we can expect or imagine, who cares for the weak, the elderly, who heals the sick, and brings us back into loving relationships with each other and our community. Maybe we're not alone after all?

Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him.

The promise *came true*.

“Is anything too wonderful for God?” If we could believe that way, how could that reshape the way we live our lives? How could that good news transform us? When we doubt, are afraid, look around and wonder how this world could ever be redeemed, we need to hear it again and again: *We wait - but God will make good on the promise. God keeps promises. God is keeping you. You have been welcomed as you are, and don't need to wait, achieve, earn, produce, or perform anything to receive the abundant life promised and procured through the cross. You are not forgotten. You are not alone.*

Maybe you're not waiting for a son, but for healing from illness, grief, addiction, loneliness, depression, and wondering when will relief come? This story reminds us that God is not far off. Nothing is impossible for God. God is not waiting for you to act right, say the right thing, be successful, smart, or clever. God chooses Abraham and Sarah. God has chosen to redeem the world. God has chosen you in baptism. You already belong. *That ought to blow your mind right there.* God would choose me? I guess nothing *is* impossible for God.

This good news transforms us. It awakens us to the reality of the kingdom among us. No tragedy, no terrorist, no violence, no injustice can undo God's saving grace. We can have hope. Our waiting is not in vain. God will deliver us. God has given us a Son. Amen.